



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges



DNR

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The family of Franklin Gravely gathers around the monument dedicated in his honor July 9 at the Camp Adger helipad overlooking the mountain region that he spent much of his life patrolling and protecting. (DNR photos by Greg Lucas)

Legendary game warden Franklin Gravely honored with Jocassee Gorges monument

DNR director says he hopes current staff can follow Gravely's example of how to serve the people and wildlife of S.C.

The late Franklin Gravely, called "as near to a perfect game warden" as ever existed, was honored July 9 with a monument in a scenic spot overlooking Jocassee Gorges in northern Pickens County. Gravely spent most of his life patrolling the mountainous region now known as Jocassee Gorges, and his efforts to preserve and protect the area are still bearing fruit today. The Franklin L. Gravely Wildlife Management Area was named in his honor in 1980.

A monument honoring Gravely's contribution to the conservation lands in northern Pickens County was unveiled Monday, July 9 at the Camp Adger helipad in

front of a gathering that including Gravely's family and his many admirers from Gravely's years of service as a conservation officer between 1953 and 1988. Gravely passed away in 2000.

"He was as near to the perfect game warden as

any that we have ever had," said Alvin Taylor, director of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "He was smart, fair and relentless. He was the ultimate woodsman. He found numerous lost individuals in the mountains. When someone was lost in the Table Rock Watershed or Horsepasture area, Franklin found them. He could track people and animals as well as anyone



Franklin Gravely plaque

I have ever met."

"He was a fine person who lived his faith. I have rarely heard of anyone who did not like Franklin, even

Continued on page 4

Sassafras Mountain improvement project gets underway

Unique partnership of public and private groups is helping to change the face of South Carolina's highest point

The Sassafras Mountain Improvement Project officially got underway Monday, Sept. 17 on top of the 3,553-foot mountain in northern Pickens County, highlighted by remarks from U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham.

Another highlight came when The Conservation Fund announced at the ceremony that it will donate 4.8 acres at the top of Sassafras, on the North Carolina side, to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

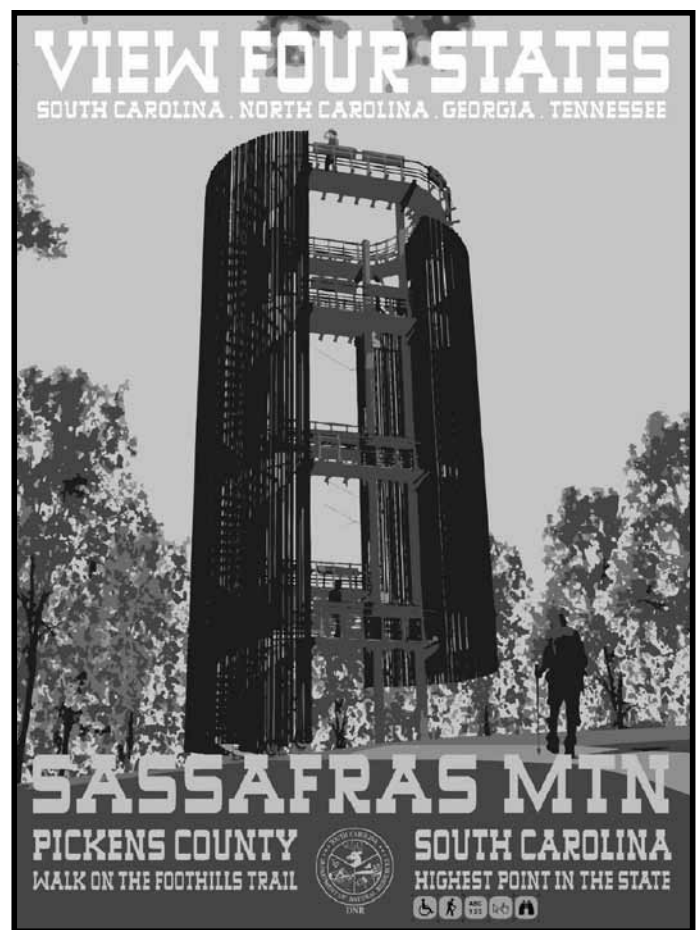
"One of the challenges of any generation is to preserve and protect the God-given beauty of our state," said U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham. "Today we are taking an important step forward in preserving for future generations this wonderful area of South Carolina. Not only are we preserving the Sassafras Mountain area for the future, we are also making it more accessible. It is important we continue to push for thoughtful conservation, combined with economic growth, to ensure the natural beauty and wonders of our state are protected for decades to come."

"We are pleased that South Carolina's highest point will now and forever be accessible to the public and are honored to be a part of this effort," said R. Michael Leonard, vice chairman of the Board of Directors for The Conservation Fund. "The Fund intends to convey the remainder of the adjacent property—the first phase of the 8,000-acre East Fork Headwaters property—to the North Carolina Forest Service later this year, preserving the awe-inspiring views surrounding Sassafras Mountain and creating additional recreational opportunities nearby."

Eventually the project will include an observation tower to give visitors a 360-degree view of the surrounding mountains of Georgia, North Carolina and even Tennessee. Other amenities will feature new trails, including a barrier-free section, and other public-use facilities such as restrooms.

Partners in the Sassafras Mountain effort include the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Pickens County, Clemson University, The Conservation Fund, The Highpointers Club, Duke Energy, the Foothills Trail Conference, and the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund. Daniel Harding, an associate professor of architecture at Clemson University with extensive experience in designing structures in natural areas, has completed a conceptual plan for Sassafras Mountain.

The partners will work to find private donors to help fund the project. All donations will be tax deductible and




Conceptual drawing of Sassafras Mountain tower by Clemson University.

will help create a crown jewel on top of the highest point in South Carolina. To donate to this project, contact Tom Swaynham, DNR regional wildlife coordinator, at (864) 654-1671, Extension 21 or at SwaynhamT@dnr.sc.gov.

"We are truly grateful to The Conservation Fund for their generous donation to the citizens of South Carolina and to all of our partners who are working to develop Sassafras Mountain into a premier destination point for the state," said Alvin Taylor, DNR director.

Sassafras Mountain, which sits on the border of South Carolina and North Carolina, has for years been a neglected landmark in northern Pickens County. Since the 77-mile Foothills Trail (www.foothillstrail.org) passes over Sassafras on its way between Table Rock and Oconee state parks, about the only regular visitors to the landmark were hikers and backpackers. However, when DNR erected a viewing platform on the western side of the parking lot in 2010, interest and visitation increased significantly and the idea of a more extensive observation platform on top of the mountain began to take hold.

Pickens County has made major contributions to the Sassafras project, including grading and repaving the road that leads to the top of the mountain, cleanup of the area around the mountain and funding. Pickens County has been an enthusiastic partner, recognizing the importance of Sassafras Mountain as a tourist destination. 



Freshmen students at Southern Wesleyan University began their college careers in a unique way by taking a four-day backpacking trip on the Foothills Trail.

Southern Wesleyan freshmen SWOOP into Jocassee Gorges

Beginning students taken wilderness trek on Foothills Trail, come together as a team

Southern Wesleyan University launched its SWOOP (Southern Wesleyan Outdoor Orientation Program) experience for incoming freshman during August 2012. Eight students joined three faculty members on the Foothills Trail for the four-day, 33-mile backpacking trip through the Jocassee Gorges from the Bad Creek Access to US Highway 178.

SWOOP objectives are that students will:

1. Build relationships leading to an increased sense of belonging in college.
2. Grow in confidence by reaching personally challenging goals.
3. Develop an increased commitment to stewardship of the environment as a trust from God.
4. Grow spiritually.
5. Become more independent and take on personal responsibility as they move away from home.
6. Discover more about themselves.


The Jocassee Gorges proved to be a great place for SWOOP. For a pilot program, SWOOP exceeded expectations. Students loved being in the wilderness and faculty members saw students, who previously had not met, come together as a strong team in just a few days. On their return to the SWU campus in Central, students

took a day to reflect on their experiences. Their reflections indicated that students achieved the SWOOP objectives. Here are a couple of highlights:

A female student noted, "This trip also taught me how far I could push myself. When there is literally nothing else to do but keep going, I was amazed at how far I could make myself go. I passed through so many personal boundaries, and I hope that I never let those boundaries stop me again...All in all, I'm so glad I went on this trip because it taught me so much about myself."

A male student said, "I learned that I am not as strong...as I thought. I learned that following God's path is a lot like the trail, there are going to be hard times and trials, but when you get to the waterfall or lake, it makes it all worth it."

Student participants from South Carolina included Erin Bolt, Racquel Brown, Dillon Groves, and Wesley Couch. Students from other states included Ethan Austin (Michigan) Sarah Bryan (Delaware), Ana Fischer (Ohio), and Kylie Rovenstine (Kansas). Faculty leaders included Dr. Roger McKenzie, Dr. Daryl Couch, and Professor Carol Sinnamon.

Planning is underway to include many more freshmen in SWOOP 2013. For more information, contact Roger McKenzie at rmckenzie@swu.edu or (864) 644-5227. 

Duke Energy's Bad Creek outdoor classroom gets students closer to nature

Northern Oconee County site offers alternative teaching site that can be used for many subjects

After many hours of planning, hard work and dedication, Duke Energy's Bad Creek outdoor classroom opened its proverbial doors to students in May.

Elementary school students and high school biology students visited the outdoor classroom, along with teachers and Bad Creek employee guides, with an adventure on their minds. No one left disappointed.

"This classroom is finally a product that can be enjoyed," said Allan Boggs, project coordinator. "The high school students were impressed, and the elementary students were amazed. I'm so pleased."

Boggs and his team logged more than 200 man hours on the classroom project, many of those volunteer hours. Their efforts have yielded an outdoor immersion classroom including a rustic, open-air classroom with seating for 40 students, a white board and an equipment storage area.

The classroom would not have been possible without the help of Skip Still, John Garton and Marcus Pitts, who donated their time, expertise and energy, according to Boggs. They assisted with the classroom's creation and helped develop usage guidelines for teachers.

The classroom offers teachers an alternative



Bad Creek employee and classroom coordinator Allan Boggs shows a specimen to students. The outdoor classroom is the centerpiece of hiking and nature identification trails, food plots, vernal ponds, butterfly garden and native wildlife habitats.

teaching site. Though created with middle school age children in mind, the site is adaptive to all grade levels and to many subject areas.

"My lesson plans included math, science and language standards," said Amanda Wiley, fourth-grade teacher at Six Mile Elementary, who visited the classroom with 68 fourth-grade students. "We had a great time, and the students have continued to talk about it."

Gravely monument dedicated in Jocassee Gorges

Continued from page 1

the violators that he caught," Taylor said. "We are lucky to have had him as an officer, and I hope our current staff can follow his example of how to serve the people and wildlife of South Carolina."

Gravely was instrumental in stocking deer and wild turkeys in the mountain region, as well as preserving

black bear habitat, and he helped to protect conservation areas in the Upstate for future generations to enjoy. A South Carolina Wildlife magazine article called Gravely "a mountain man's mountain man, a living legend throughout the rugged wilderness of northwestern South Carolina." ❁

AmeriCorps team improves Raven Rock Trail

Ohio native has life-changing experience working at Keowee-Toxaway State Park, discovering mountain life in S.C.

By Brandi Perkins
AmeriCorps NCCC

For the past seven months, my life has been a combination of chaos and amazing experiences. My name is Brandi Perkins and I am a 22 year old from Akron, Ohio. In February 2011 I applied online for a program called AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and began serving the Southern Region in July.

AmeriCorps NCCC is a 10-month full-time, residential program for men and women ages 18-24 that are organized into teams of 10-12 members. We serve in five regions of the United States in communities, meeting needs in the areas of: disaster services; environmental stewardship; energy conservation; urban and rural development; and, infrastructure improvement. NCCC members respond to disasters, construct homes, develop trails in state and national parks, mentor children and youth, oversee emergency shelters, organize donations of food, clothing and other materials, lead volunteers and meet many other needs identified by communities. Members receive CPR and first aid training, leadership training, project development, valuable work experience and an AmeriCorps education award of \$5,550 that can be used to pay tuition or student loans.

Before I joined NCCC I was working two jobs and traveling aimlessly while trying to figure out what to do with my future. I definitely didn't think that a year later I would be living in Table Rock State Park in the beautiful mountains of South Carolina. My team and I have been working in Keowee-Toxaway State Park for six weeks assisting with the reroute of Raven Rock Trail. With the excellent leadership of State Park Service staff Kevin Blanton, Michael Trotter, and Mike Watkins, 1 mile of the trail has been finished. The reroute will make the trail a little bit easier, open up a better view of Lake Keowee, and

give more visitors a chance to enjoy the natural beauty of the park.


With only a few days left here in this wonderful place, our hearts are beginning to feel heavy with the thought of leaving. We have met so many wonderful people and now truly understand the meaning of Southern hospitality. After just a month and a half, this place feels like home. The team had the opportunity to experience some Southern traditions like picking cotton at Hagood Mill, attending Music in the Mountains at Table Rock State Park, Friday night bluegrass at Oolenoy Community

Center, a Young Appalachian Musicians (YAM) fundraiser, and of course, hiking many of the trails in the area. Habitat for Humanity, Six Mile Elementary and Miracle Hill Children's Home also allowed us to come do some extra volunteer hours with them.

I would also like to thank Table Rock State Park Manager Poll Knowland for his welcoming attitude, uplifting conversations and compassionate personality! The Blue Ridge Mountains will

forever hold a piece of my heart and I know many of my team mates would say the same thing. This project was truly amazing and we are so grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of the community even for this short period of time. I know I will be back soon!

Since my AmeriCorps NCCC term ended in May, I applied and got accepted for two other AmeriCorps programs. The first one was a summer program in Alaska called SAGA. It was similar to NCCC except my team and I would've been camping out the whole time building trails and cabins, clearing streams, and beautifying Alaska! Then I was offered a position with Habitat for Humanity in Norfolk, Va. Unfortunately I had to turn down both jobs because I got accepted into NCCC again! I'm very excited to serve a second term at my new campus in Denver and meet even more amazing people.

I still keep in touch with a few of my South Carolina friends. One in particular, Mule, has been so great to me. He even sent me a whole set of harmonicas for my birthday, just so I don't forget all the good times we had at the weekend bluegrass jam sessions. I sincerely miss the mountains and all the kind souls I met. 



The AmeriCorps team that worked on Raven Rock Trail poses for a photo at Jumping-Off Rock Overlook with Michael Trotter of the S.C. State Park Service. The author, Brandi Perkins, is at far right, waving.

Franklin Gravely was a mou

Retired officer who trained under Franklin Gravely tells some stories about the legendary game warden

By Mack “Houn’ Dawg” Erwin

Franklin Gravely was such a living legend that the first time I even heard of him was when I was a student at Clemson University. A friend of mine told me a story of a game warden who had wrestled and pinned a black bear at the fair. I thought that was impossible until eight years later when I started working with Franklin Gravely.

‘We’re going to do whatever it takes!’

“I’d ten times rather catch a man growing marijuana than catch a man fishing without a license.”—Franklin Gravely

Franklin Gravely loved to work the mountains so much that if there was anything going on, he wanted to know about it, get to the bottom of it, and he wanted to do it right then.

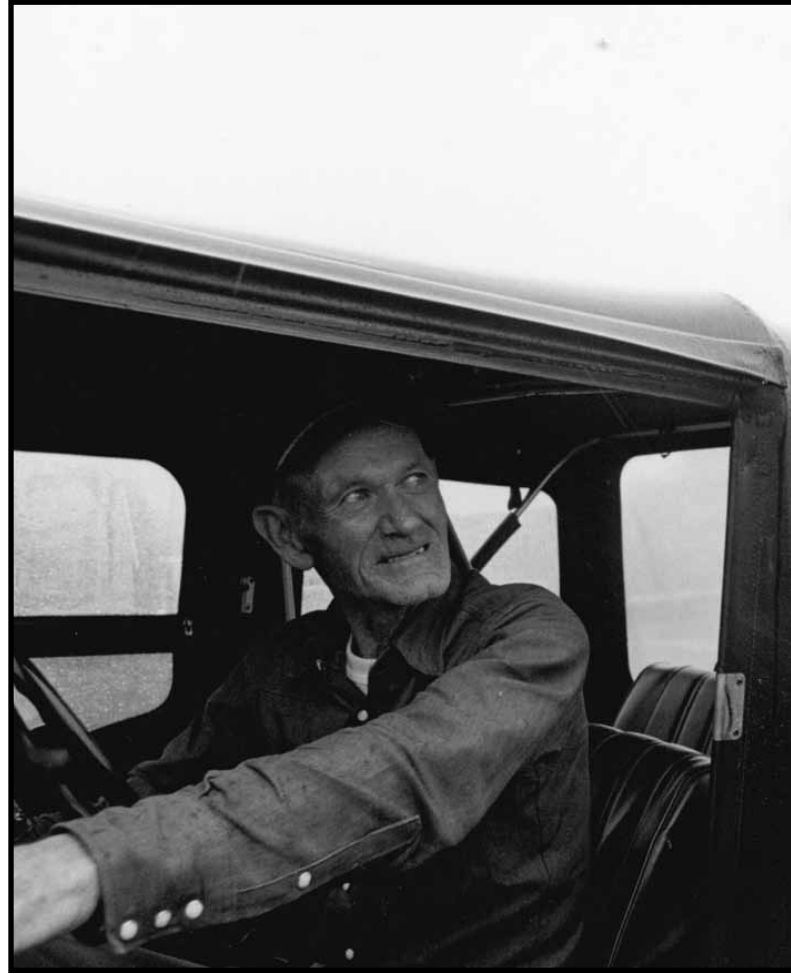
On one Friday morning, Franklin called Sgt. Gerald Holcomb and me to meet him at the end of Eastatoee Road Extension, a dead-end road next to the Eastatoee River. There was a car parked up there that was out of place. It had been there several days, and since turkey season was already over, Franklin said, “Either somebody’s lost, hurt or poaching or growing marijuana.”

So with no preparation, the three of us started up Eastatoee River following a track every once in awhile. We passed Little Laurel branch and then Side-of-Mountain Creek and came up on the lower end of Eastatoee Gorge, where it was impossible to continue up the river. We started looking around and on the left-hand side found some left-over monofilament fishing line. Franklin said, “That’s no fishing line—it’s a trip line!”



The stories of Franklin Gravely's search and rescue efforts and his tracking abilities are legendary.

So we began following this line that was about knee-high up the side of Narrow Ridge, working our way slowly and quietly until we started smelling woodsmoke. We worked our way up to a campground in a saddle of the ridge and found a man armed with a pistol tending the fire. We slipped up on this man, and found evidence of tools used to grow marijuana. There were several tents around, and we entered the tents one by one with .357 pistols drawn on the suspects, indicating for them to quietly exit the tent.



Game warden Franklin Gravely (right) spent much of his life in his efforts to preserve and protect the area are still bearing

Each suspect was armed with a pistol and each suspect was disarmed and informed that he was under arrest.

We had six young men and one ugly, old, fat, pot-bellied man covered in tattoos under arrest. We were in a remote area with no easy access. Our walkie-talkie radio would not transmit out of this area and even if it did very few people would know where to come to help us.

So as we were deciding on how to securely get these men back down to our trucks, the old man sat down and said, “You ain’t takin’ me!”

Franklin asked, “What do you mean we ain’t takin’ you?”

The old man replied: “If you take me, I go back to prison—so you ain’t takin’ me!”

“What were you in prison for?” Franklin asked.

“For killing a security guard,” said the old man. “I killed two of them, but only got convicted of killing one.”

At this point, I figured it was time to do something. I was up here in these remote mountains with two old game wardens facing seven suspects who didn’t appear to have a lot to lose by fighting us. I was just getting ready to put a boot under the chin of the ugly old fat man who refused to go

Mountain man's mountain man



life patrolling the area now known as Jocassee Gorges, and fruit today.

when Franklin grabbed me by the arm.

"You know what?" Franklin said in a very stern voice. "You're right—we may not be able to take you. But we're going to try! And we're going to do whatever it takes to take you. Even if we have to tie you up to a tree and leave you up here while we take the rest to jail and come back to get you later!"

This did not appeal to the old convict, and all seven of them walked out peacefully with us and were put in the Pickens County Jail.

A side note: One of the suspects, who was from Greenville, was released on bond, and shot his next-door neighbor before his Pickens County trial date came up.

No more gun play

Long before I came to work for the S.C. Wildlife and Marine Resources Department (the agency's name before it became DNR in 1994), Franklin was training two young officers that later became top supervisors in the department.

These young men were very proud to be with the wildlife department, and both were very competitive. At times, they wanted to see who could draw their .357

magnum the fastest, and would draw against each other as if they were gunslingers back in the Old West. Of course, they would unload their pistols, count out six bullets, show each other that each was putting six bullets in his pocket, and then display an empty cylinder of the pistol before closing it and holstering an "empty" gun.

Franklin knew he needed to do something about this gun play and decided in his own way how to handle it without reprimanding two very promising officers.

The three of them had been working up in the mountains one day, and as the two young officers were preparing their routine before drawing on each other, Franklin took a seat on a log nearby as if to sit back and watch. The two young officers were pacing off and just before they were ready to draw, Franklin took his .357 magnum out of its holder, thumb-cocked it, and pointed it behind his back.

Just as the two men drew on each other, Franklin pulled the trigger of his pistol and let off a live round. Both officers, believing each had been shot, were frantically looking and grasping at his chest for a bullet wound!

This tactic worked, and there was no more gun play! Both officers later became top supervisors, and carried their lessons from Franklin Gravely with them.



The Franklin L. Gravely Wildlife Management Area in the Jocassee Gorges was named in his honor in 1980.

Earnest calls Franklin on the telephone

Earnest, a relative of Franklin's, decided to go fishing in one of the old rivers that flows into what is now Lake Jocassee and Lake Keowee. Earnest was bad to use an illegal method of fishing called telephoning, which would shock nearby fish and cause them to jump out of the water.

Franklin was aware of this and wanted to catch Earnest red-handed.

Earnest was down by the river one evening, along with a couple of his fishing buddies. There may have been some drinking involved. As Earnest was cranking on that old telephone, in a joking and playful manner, he started calling the legendary game warden. "Hello, Franklin, this is Earnest. Hello, Franklin, can you hear me? Where are you, Franklin?"

About that time, Franklin stepped out quietly from

Continued on page 10



A new trail around Pinnacle Lake that opened earlier this year at Table Rock State Park includes spectacular views. DNR employees (from left) Geoff Schwitzgebelm, Denise Froehle and Holly Gillam enjoy the atmosphere around South Carolina's most famous mountain. (DNR photo by Greg Lucas)

Pinnacle Lakeside Trail completed at Table Rock State Park

Footpath started 70 years ago
by Civilian Conservation Corps completed

The Civilian Conservation Corps started building a trail around Table Rock State Park's centerpiece Pinnacle Lake in 1941. A half-mile stretch from the park boathouse to just beyond the park's historic mountain lodge was completed before work was interrupted by World War II.


Seven decades later the circle has been completed, taking hikers on a 1.9-mile cir-cle tour around the lake with spectacular views of Table Rock and some previously seldom-seen park property. The new 1.4-mile section, funded through a state parks grant, starts at the parking area for picnic shelters 1 and 2, which is the new trail head for the loop.

It's an easy walk, with one short moderate section where steps go up a hill on the original section of trail. Benches all along the trail offer places to rest and enjoy the view.

The beginning of the new trail is a mulch-covered walkway along the south side of the lake. Eventually

it turns to dirt, but unlike the older section and more typical hiking trail, the surface is smooth, free of tree roots and is wide enough for hikers to walk side by side. The new section of the trail accommodates bicyclists as well. A section in wetlands was hand dug without the aid of equipment, and a low wooden bridge crosses a small, unnamed stream surrounded by mountain laurel and rhododendron.

Along with the scenery, the trail is a lesson in history. From the wetlands, the trail runs to the top of the Pinnacle Lake dam, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Drill marks are etched into the edges of hand-hewn rectangular rocks lining the side of the spillway. Workers earning \$1 a day drilled into the rock by hand, inserted white oak pegs and poured in water. The white oak soaked up the water, expanded and split the rock. The trail winds down from the dam to a bridge that crosses Carrick Creek below the 54-foot-tall granite rock dam. A veil of water cascades across the face of the rock. It was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps to resemble a natural waterfall. 

Heyward Douglass new executive director of Foothills Trail Conference

‘Mr. Foothills Trail’ assumes reins of venerable trail organization

Heyward Douglass, longtime board member with the Foothills Trail Conference, has been named the executive director of the organization that is responsible for maintaining and promoting the popular 77-mile mountain trail.

Known as “Mr. Foothills Trail,” Douglass has long been the trail’s most visible proponent. After retiring from Clemson University as a pilot in 2010, Douglass thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine in 2011. He assumed the duties of executive director of the Foothills Trail Conference effective June 1, 2012.

Douglass started his work with the Foothills Trail Conference in 1986, began serving on the board in 1989, and was board chair from 1999-2005. He has spent countless days on the Foothills Trail building new trail bed, maintaining the trail, taking pictures, tracking GPS coordinates for the guidebook and map, and greeting hikers.

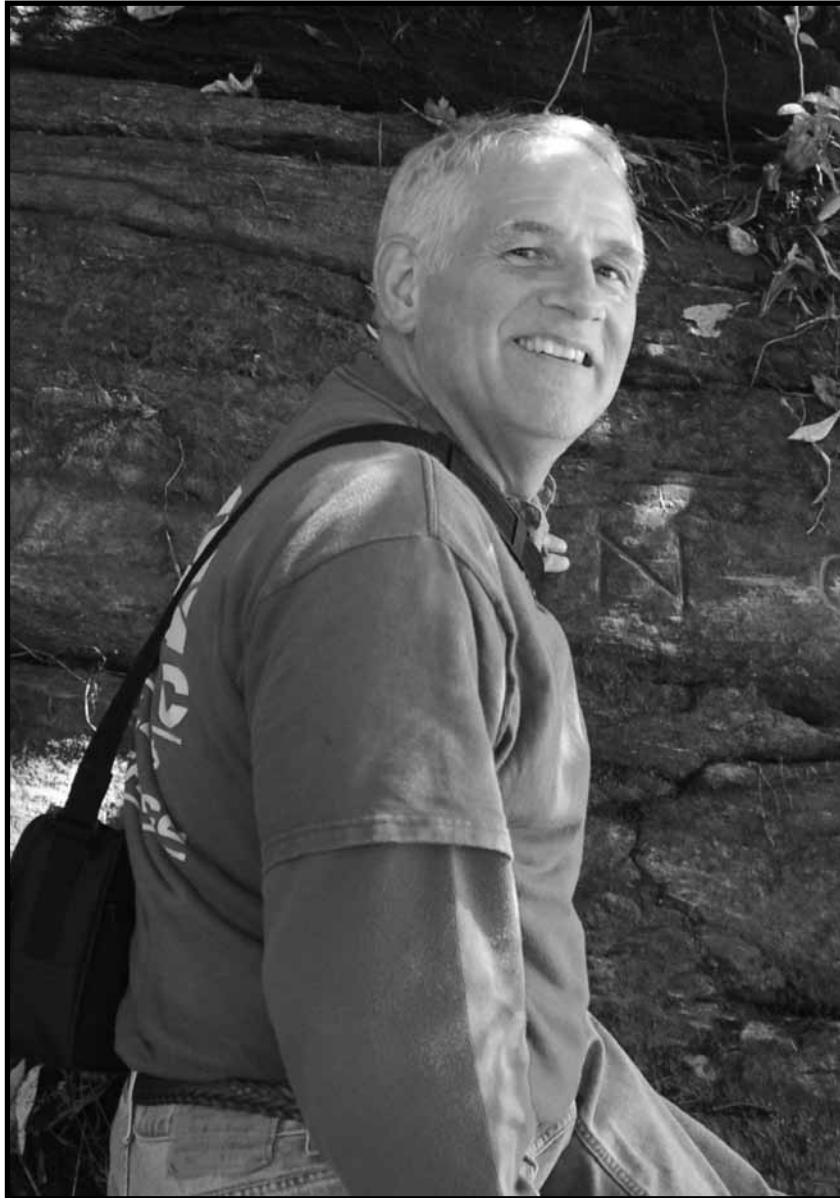
Among his many duties as the Foothills Trail Conference staff person, Douglass will be responsible for the administrative functions of communicating

to hikers, Foothills Trail Conference members and stakeholders. He will process merchandise orders and memberships and work to increase membership and improve relationships with the stakeholders who manage the land the trail passes through. Douglass will continue to promote the trail with Upstate business, recreation and visitor organizations.

Douglass was also the inspiration for the Peregrine Award, available to those who hike all 77 miles of the Foothills Trail between Oconee State Park and Table Rock State Park. The Peregrine Award was begun in 2011 in honor of Douglass, and to thank him for his service and dedication. Douglass used the trail name “Peregrine” when he thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail. He chose the trail name “Peregrine” because it is one of his favorite birds, and he played a key role in the re-introduction of the peregrine falcon to the mountains of South Carolina. Also, the word peregrine comes from the Spanish word peregrino, which means

pilgrim, befitting of Douglass’ hiking personality. Douglass was also instrumental in the development and publication of the Foothills Trail Guidebook and Map, which he continues to update as trail conditions change.

For more information on the Foothills Trail, visit www.foothillstrail.org.



Heyward Douglass, seen here at Ellicott's Rock, is the new executive director of the Foothills Trail Conference, the organization that oversees and maintains the 77-mile Foothills Trail between Table Rock and Oconee state parks. (DNR photo by Greg Lucas)



The trail completion at Nine Times Preserve was announced at an Earth Day trail dedication ceremony on site attended by donors and officials who helped make the new trail a reality.

New trail opens at Nine Times Preserve

The Nature Conservancy celebrates Earth Day 2012 with a new trail


The Nature Conservancy in South Carolina opened a new trail to the public April 12 at the popular Nine Times Preserve in northern Pickens County. The trail completion was announced at an Earth Day trail dedication ceremony on site attended by donors and officials who helped make the new trail and interpretive signage a reality.

"We are excited to invite people to experience the streams, the wildflowers and small rock outcrops along this new trail, an area that visitors have not had access to before," said Kristen Austin, Southern Blue Ridge project director. This trail project received assistance from the Recreational Trails Program in cooperation with the South Carolina Trails Program and the Federal Highway Administration.



Nine Times Preserve is one of the most biologically significant properties in the Southeast. The Nature Conservancy took ownership in 2008 with the assistance of Upstate Forever, a grant from the South Carolina Conservation Bank and private donations from individuals and foundations. It has served as a Wildlife Management Area, designated through the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, for hikers, anglers and hunters, gaining access along old logging roads. The new 2-mile trail connects the logging roads.

Located where the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains meet the Piedmont, the preserve is a 15-minute drive from the town of Pickens. The land contains two mountains and is home to seven distinct forest types, unique rock outcrop plant communities, trout, and black bears.

For directions and a trail map, go to www.nature.org/southcarolina. 

Franklin Gravely 'best game warden ever'


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behind some cover along the riverbank, tapped Earnest on the shoulder, and said: "I'm right here, Earnest!"

Earnest jumped up and shouted, "Uh-Oh!"

When Earnest's fishing buddies, from their inebriated fog, asked "What's the matter Earnest?" Earnest just said, "He answered me!"

Franklin Gravely was not just the best game warden I ever worked with, or the best supervisor I ever worked for, he was the best teacher and best role model a game warden could ever have. And for that, I'll forever be grateful.

The thing I regret most about working with this department is not recognizing early on how valuable my time with Franklin was. If I could go back in time, I would be waiting on his doorstep every morning—ready to learn another lesson. 

Mack "Houn' Dawg" Erwin retired in 2010 as an officer with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources with more than 30 years law enforcement experience. He spent his formative first years as a game warden in Pickens County training under the legendary Lt. Franklin Gravely.

Oconee State Park manager can't imagine being anywhere else

White says all seasons are magical at northern Oconee County park

By Odell Suttle

Jo Anna White is living her dream.

White has been the manager of Oconee State Park, near Mountain Rest since July 2009 and said she cannot imagine living anywhere else or being involved in another profession.

"It's a different world," White said.

"I live in the park. You live everyday like it is keeping up your own front yard or back yard. It is a part of my life. When I retire, I don't know what I will do because this is all I have ever known."

White was born and raised in Grover, N.C., and grew up going to Kings Mountain State Park with her parents, who were avid campers. When she was a teenager, White started working as a lifeguard at Kings Mountain and has never quit working for the State Park Service.

"I worked there throughout my college years as a lifeguard," White said. "I knew after my first summer working at Kings Mountain what I wanted to do."

White first worked at Oconee as a park ranger in 1994 and knew immediately it was the place for her.



Oconee State Park Manager Jo Anna White enjoys a moment with park-goers beside the park's scenic lake. (Photo by Toni Becker)

"Oconee is heart wrenching," White said. "When I first moved down here in 1994, I called my mom and said 'I am home'."

It is difficult to know the peak season at Oconee, White said. Of course there is summer but October is one of their busiest months when the campers take over and decorate for Halloween and give out candy. Then November has Thanksgiving with campers showing off the many different ways to cook turkey.

The cabins are filled and decorated for Christmas. Two or three families will rent cabins near each other and celebrate Christmas together. A new tradition was started January 1, 2012, when the park hosted the first annual First Day Hike.

"None of Oconee would be Oconee without the caring staff. The outstanding administration/operations, talented maintenance staff, housekeeping staff and dedicated volunteers. Oconee's true heart is the staff," White said.

(Odell Suttle was born, raised and still lives near Fountain Inn. He is a sports reporter for The Greenville News and Tribune-Times and writes feature articles for Late Model Racer, a Virginia magazine.) ❁



White grew up camping with her parents and she says the atmosphere of a state park feels very natural to her. (Photo by Odell Suttle)



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S.C. Department of Natural Resources

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New Jocassee Gorges map funded by Harry Hampton Wildlife Fund

Improved map and driving tour
publication now available at state parks
and Clemson DNR office

A new Jocassee Gorges map and driving
tour has been printed by the Harry Hampton
Memorial Wildlife Fund.

The 38-inch-by-27-inch map and driving
tour is the most comprehensive publication available
for the 33,500-acre Jim Timmerman Natural Resources
Area at Jocassee Gorges in northern Pickens and Oconee
counties. The new map features GPS coordinates,
along with improved property features and access road
names. Two years ago, the Hampton Fund printed
20,000 copies of the map and driving tour, which were
all distributed by Summer 2012. The Hampton Fund
recently contributed \$5,500 to print another 20,000
copies of an improved map and driving tour.

The maps are available at most mountain state
parks and at the S.C. Department of Natural Resources
(DNR) office in Clemson.

The Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife fund
is a private, non-profit corporation that partners with
DNR for the promotion of natural resources and natural
resources education. It has contributed a total of almost



\$3 million to DNR conservation projects.

The Hampton Fund provided funding for
exhibits at the Jocassee Gorges Visitor Center at Keowee-
Toxaway State Park, as well as publication and
mailing of the Jocassee Journal newsletter for
the past 13 years. For more information on the
Hampton Fund, visit www.hamptonfund.org.

Other projects supported and funded by the
Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund include:

- * DNR Envirothon competition
- * Teacher grants and educational projects
- * Beaver and furbearer management
- * Habitat enhancement and protection
- * Venomous snakes' poster
- * Marine educational guides and posters
- * Marine Resources Division programs
- * Fish stocking and tagging programs
- * Striped bass research
- * Riverbanks Zoo Veterinary Internship Program
- * Operation Game Thief rewards for reporting fish
and game violations
- * Camp Wildwood
- * South Carolina Wildlife magazine Outdoor
Communicator competition awards.
- * Hampton Fund Scholarship programs
- * Bruce Rush Artificial Reef